

Sikhs and the 1857 Mutiny

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Fingers are constantly being pointed at the Sikhs regarding 1857 and their non-support of the so-called War of Independence, ignoring the fact that today, most eminent historians are now defining 1857 Mutiny as a localized outbreak of religious insurrection headed by a group, the Sikhs had historically considered enemies—the Mughal throne.

THE Sikhs have often been maligned for not supporting the Mutiny of 1857; and, instead accused having helped the British in suppressing it. Whether it was a mutiny or a war of independence, is a controversial matter, and the people have applauded or condemned it from their respective points of view. According to Sir J. N. Sarkar, "the Sepoy Mutiny was not a fight for freedom."¹ J. P. Kriplani says "it was nothing but an attempt by the old order to get back their kingdoms and principalities."² Dr. R. C. Majumdar writes that "it was neither 'first', nor 'national' nor 'a war of independence'."³

Many assert that the main reason for the sepoys to revolt was religious, in that the newly introduced cartridge, its wrapping had to be bitten by the teeth before it could be used, thus polluting both the Muslims as well as the Hindus, as it was rumoured that pig's lard and cow's fat had been used for lubricating its paper wrappings. Quite often discontent breeds through bad administration, inhuman treatment at the hands of officers, hurting the religious feelings of their men, and various other factors which go on accumulating till a time comes when this inflammable material needs only a matchstick to explode. In this case the newly introduced cartridge, "an

1. *Hindustan Standard*, Puja Number, 1956.

2. *The Panjab, Past and Present*, Panjabi University, Patiala, April 1978, P. 103.

3. *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, R. C. Majumdar, P. xvii

ill-judged piece of military reform", served as the needed matchstick.

At the time of the 1857 Mutiny, the East India Company had three different armies under its command. These were :

- a) The Bengal Army, mainly composed of Brahmins and Rajputs from Oudh ; of the 1,20,000 men comprising the regular cavalry and infantry regiments, probably 70,000 to 80,000 men were from Oudh.⁴ Strange, there were no troops from Bengal in the army, although named "Bengal Army"
- b) The Madras Army, mainly composed of South Indians ; and
- c) The Bombay Army, composed of 7,000 Brahmins and Rajputs from Oudh, an equivalent number of Marhathas, and the balance of 12,000 men formed a mixed lot from all over the place. The Marhathas hated the Poorbias, that is, U. P. people.

Of these three Armies, none of the Madras Army units took part in the Mutiny. On

the other hand, they were employed in suppressing the mutineers. The Madras Artillery, in particular, was of great help in dealing with the mutineers at Kanpur and in Oudh. Six native battalions of the Madras Army were deployed in the Madhya Pradesh area, and another fifty-two battalions stood fast throughout the Mutiny and were in existence till 1860.

Of the Bombay Army, only a portion of the two battalions (26th and 27th) took part in the revolt. About 8,000 Marhathas of the Bombay Army stood firm with the British, in spite of Nana Sahib, who was considered to be their *Peshwa*. The Bombay Army supplied most of the men to subdue the Mutiny, especially in the campaigns under Sir Hume Rose.⁵ "The Madras and Bombay Armies," writes Macmunn, "as well as the Hyderabad Contingent, took an active part in suppressing mutiny and rebellion in various parts of India, notably in Central India."⁶

As for the Bengal Army, it was only a portion of the caste-ridden men of the so called high classes, i. e. U. P. Brahmins and U. P. Rajputs, who revolted. It was, thus, an insubordination developing into a

4. *The Panjab and Delhi in 1857*, Cave-Brown, Vol. I, P. 26. (Panjab Bhasha Vibhag, reprint 1970)

5. *A Matter of Honour*, Masson, P. 305

6. *The Armies in India*, Lt-Gen Macmunn, P. 101

revolt of part of the soldiery of one of the three Presidency Armies.

The whole effort was an uncoordinated and aimless affair. If the Muslims had decided to attack on a particular day, it was considered inauspicious by the Hindu pandits. "Luckily," wrote General Wilson to Mr. Colvin, in July 1857, "the enemy have no head and no method, and we hear dissensions are breaking out among them."⁷ It was not a well-planned and efficiently conducted operation, but was a spontaneous outburst of the few. The mutineers lacked good and efficient leadership; they had no central command, all were on their own in small parties and were beaten. "The fact," writes Dr. Tara Chand, in the *History of the Freedom Movement*, "is that no leader of requisite organising ability arose to guide the movement There was no proper plan of campaign, no real understanding of the enormity of the task, no appreciation of the strategic needs, no regular supply of funds and ammunitions of war.....It was a transient transformation of the will of the people."

Pandit Nehru writes : "It is clear, however, that there was a lack of nationalist feeling which might have bound the people of India together. Nationalism of the modern type was yet to come."⁸ India then lacked a single political identity; various parts of the sub-continent struggled independently, even fought against each other. There was no joint effort. Till lately, the term "Hindustan" had covered merely the area composed of the present Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

As for the Sikhs, they had recently been defeated in the Second Anglo-Sikh War and were completely disarmed⁹ and disbanded. Their non-governmental fortifications were razed to the ground; manufacture and sale of arms and ammunition was forbidden to them. Their leaders who "might have become the centres of disaffection" were either killed during the Sikh Wars or had been deported from the Punjab.¹⁰ During the first year of the British administration, over 8,000 persons had been arrested in the Punjab. Thus the Sikhs were left leaderless and rudderless. Virtually no capable person of any

7. Cave-Brown, *Op. Cit.* Vol. II, P. 46, Cave-Brown further writes (P. 36) 'In this disunion, this perpetual liability to a rupture, this conflict of interests, rivalry of claims, this natural suspicion, the absence of any one leading mind, lay our chief safeguard.'

8. *Discovery of India*, J. L. Nehru, P. 279

9. *Rise of the Christian Power*, Basu, P. 957, Lord Lawrence, Aitchison, P. 81.

10. *The Fourth Panjab Administration Report*, 1856-68, Para 149.

importance was left among them who could lead the Sikh masses. Richard Temple, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Punjab, observed that "Upon these sturdy and courageous people the British victories seemed to have acted like a spell."¹¹ And "there was comfort too," wrote Kaye, "in the remembrance that the Panjab had been disarmed; that the warlike population of the conquered country no longer went about with swords at their sides, or had firelocks stored in the houses."¹²

"It is certainly," writes Jawaharlal Nehru "to the credit of the British that they could win over the Sikhs in this way; whether it is to the credit or discredit of the Sikhs of those days depends upon one's point of view."¹³ It was not only the Sikhs who were won over by the British but other religious denominations in India also. The British had established their control over the Punjab through various methods. The British officers employed for administration in the Punjab after the annexation "had two redeeming features—confidence and paternalism."¹⁴ "They had," wrote Aitchison, "a respect for native

ways and institutions and did not consider a thing bad because it was not English. They put themselves in the people's place and made the interests and the care of the people their own, and create as it were a family feeling."¹⁵ Thus better administration rendered to the Punjab under the Lawrences stood them in good stead during the Mutiny.

As compared to the slow action of the military authorities elsewhere, particularly at Meerut, John Lawrence acted promptly in Punjab and saved it from falling into the hands of the mutineers. At Amritsar alone, Mr. Cooper, the Deputy Commissioner, put 300 mutineers to death. John Lawrence had such a hold over the Punjab soldiery that they were willing to be led against the rebel sepoys. He raised new units of Sikhs, Panjabi Mussalmans and Hindu Hill Rajputs, and by the end of August their strength rose to 34,000 men. "The troops, are drawn," wrote John Lawrence, "from a variety of races differing in religion, birth place, habits and dialects. Many of these are so utterly alien to Sikhs as to the Hindustanis that

11. *Men and Events of my Time in India*, Richard Temple (1882).

12. *A History of the Sepoy War in India*, J. W. Kaye, Vol. ii, p. 316.

13. *Discovery of India*, J. L. Nehru, p. 279.

14. *Punjab under the Lawrences*, N. M. Khilnani, The Panjab Government Record Office Publication, Monograph No. 2, 1951, p. 127.

15. *Lord Lawrence*, Aitchison, p. 69.

they could be depended on to fight against the Sikhs."¹⁶

Poorbias and Sikhs

The Poorbias had fought against the Sikhs and actually helped the British defeat the Sikhs and occupy their country. The Poorbias had helped the British not only against the Sikhs, but also in the subjugation of the Jats, Marhathas, Rajputs, Gorkhas and the Pathans. "Not only the Indian men," writes Bipan Chandra, "but even Indian revenues were used" "to conquer the rest of India and to consolidate British rule."¹⁷ "The Poorbia Sepoys," writes R.C. Majumdar, "had not the least scruple to fight the Sikhs." How could the Sikhs have helped their one time enemy in their aimless strife? No one can so soon and so easily forget the misdeeds of others committed against them.

During the Anglo-Sikh wars, the British forces were mainly composed of the Natives of India (except the Panjabis). Besides the cavalry and artillery, during the battle of Mudki, the ten Native Infantry Regiments—2nd, 16th, 24th, 26th, 41st, 42nd, 45th, 47th, 48th and 73rd—that fought against the Sikhs were all composed of the Poorbias.

And during the battle of Ferozepur that followed, General Littler's force was "all sepoy infantry except one weak British Regiment."¹⁸ These regiments were: 12th, 14th, 33rd, 44th and 54th Native Infantry Regiments. Similarly, the Native Infantry Regiment forming part of General Harry Smith's force that fought against the Sikhs at Aliwal and Buddowal were 24th, 30th, 36th, 47th and 48th. The situation at Sabraon was no different.

Then there were the two Poorbia traitors—Lal Singh and Tej Singh, Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief respectively of the Punjab—who had betrayed the Sikhs and acted treacherously. "With a little enterprise," writes Thorburn, "Tej Singh might have taken Ferozepore and Lal Singh Moodki, and thus captured the whole baggage and stores of the Anglo-Sepoy Forces."¹⁹ But no, they were not interested in victory for the Punjab. One can easily come to the conclusion that the Poorbias had been responsible for the loss of independence of Punjab and consequently of the whole of the Indian sub-continent. Had the British been defeated during the Anglo-Sikh Wars, the foundations of the British *Rāj* in Hindustan would have been shaken.

16. *Mutiny Reports*, Vol. viii, Part II, pp. 1340-1341, Punjab Government Records.

17. *Freedom Struggle*, National Book Trust Publication, 1972, p. 10.

18. *The Punjab in Peace and War*, Thorburn, p. 47.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

The British would have been on the run, and, many taking courage would have joined the forces, fighting the British. To consider the Mutiny, under such circumstances, as a war of independence is the travesty of truth.

After the annexation of the Punjab kingdom, there were over 10,000 British Troops and about 36,000 Regular Hindustani Troops²⁰ stationed in the Punjab to suppress the Panjabis, especially the Sikhs. Most of the vital military centers like Attock, Kangra, Phillaur were with the Poorbias troops who also looked after the magazines and arsenals. The Panjabis considered the Poorbias as the army of occupation and detested them. The Sikhs "resented the presence of Eastern troops in the Punjab; their embryo nationalism had been Panjabi, not Indian, and they were to take any chance of getting their own back on the Bengal sepoy, this time with the British on their side."²¹ Secondly, the presence of Hindustanis in the Punjab had deprived the Panjabis of service and emoluments rightfully theirs. "There was," writes Khilnani, "hardly any unifying link binding

the Panjabis and the people of other provinces. It is therefore, vain to expect that the Panjabis would make common cause with the sepoys".²² Again, the Poorbia units located in the Punjab had not risen against the British in support of their brethren. Had these Poorbia units given a lead, the Panjabi would most probably have been tempted to follow them. Dr. Khilnani says that "had the sepoys in the Punjab chosen to display one tenth of the energy and skill which Lawrence and his men showed, they could have seriously threatened the British position."²³ Subedar Sita Ram was of the opinion "that if the people of the Punjab should rebel and fight the *sirkār* there would be 1,00,000 Hindustanis ready and willing to take service against them, if only to pay off old scores."²⁴ This shows there was mutual distrust.

Sensing the Sikh feelings against the Poorbias, the British tried to placate the Sikhs in a number of ways. For example, Captain Hodson of the Hodson's Horse, "deliberately" shot and killed two Mughal Princes and had their bodies publicly displayed at the place where a century and a

20. Thorburn, p. 198; Cave Brown, p. 41.

21. *A Matter of Honour*, Masson, p. 236.

22. *The Punjab under the Lawrences*, p. 137.

23. *Ibid*, p. 146,

24. *From Sepoy to Subedar*, Subedar Sita Ram, p. 84.

half earlier, their Ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur had been executed on orders of then Mughal Emperor.²⁵ Thus the Sikhs started regarding Captain Hodson as an "avenger of their martyred Gooroo" and were ready to follow him anywhere.

Major Macmunn sums up the Sikh feelings and their attitude towards the Mutiny thus : "The motives that brought the Punjab and the border to our aid, were no doubt mixed ones. Some content with our administration, some liking for English ways, seen at their best in the cold of the northern winters, some memories of the hard hitting of Sabraon, of Chillianwala, and Gujrat, a dislike of the Poorbeah, our abetting instrument in conquering them.....all had, no doubt their place."²⁶

Role of the Princely States

As for the Sikh States, they did help the British with men, money and material.

"The Maharaja of Patiala supplied 5,000 men and also secured the lines of communication between Panipat and Delhi; Nabha provided the British with 800 men; Raja of Jind kept clear the road for the British troops for their advance towards Delhi; Kapurthala helped them with a contingent of 2000 men."^{26A} It was only due to them that the Amritsar Treaty of 1809 was signed between the British and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Treaty divided the Sikhs into two camps and also checked the Maharaja from consolidating the Sikhs into one compact nation, and marked the Satluj as a permanent division among them, which is even now so marked. These states had always acted for their selfish ends, without bothering whether their actions were against the Sikhs as a nation or not.

The mutineers had placed Bahadur Shah on the Delhi throne; this also seems to

25. *Twelve Years of a Soldier's Life in India*, Hodson, p. 302; Field Marshal Roberts writes that Hodson, on his way from Humayun's tomb to Delhi himself shot and killed three Mughal Princes in front of the *kotwālī*. On enquiry Hodson said, "the circumstance was that he feared they would be rescued by the mob, who would easily have over-powered his small escort of 100 *sowārs*, and it certainly would have been a misfortune had these men escaped." (*Forty-one Years in India*, F. M. Earl Roberts of Kandhar, 1911 ed : p. 137.)

26. *The Armies in India*, Macmunn, p. 102.

26A *The Sikhs*, Gordon, pp. 907-208; Lepel Griffin gives the breakdown of the Patiala Contingent as follows : 156 officers, 2156 Horse, 2846 Infantry and 8 guns. (*The Rajas of the Panjab*, 1970 Reprint, p. 216.)"

have prevented the Sikhs from supporting the Mutiny. This must have revived the past when the Mughals had committed savage atrocities on the Sikhs and tried to exterminate them. Salah-ud-din Malik is correct in calling the 1857 Mutiny as a "Muslim rebellion",²⁷ raised by the Muslim aristocracy who according to W. H. Hunter, were the descendants of sometime princes and had lost their monopoly on lands and official positions, as a result of the British conquests. The British interpretation of the Mutiny was that this was a "Muslim subversion aimed at restoring Mughal rule."²⁸ Giving the Mutiny a communal form also seems to have been one of the major causes of its failure.

Bahadur Shah contacted the Maharaja of Patiala urging him to join the mutiny. He wrote to the Maharaja :

"To him of noble rank and lordly dignity, our own devoted vassal, worthy of our confidence and favour, the union of benevolence and high mindedness, Nerinder Singh, the Maharaja of Patiala. Date 21st Ramzan.

"My life is passing from my lips, come

then that I may survive ; for if I cease to be, what will become of you ?

"Of the downfall of this Government, and of the great revolution in the course of development, which are at the present being bruited about, you have heard from the papers. Relying upon your well-proved devotedness and loyalty towards this our own favour-bestowing family, you are written to, that with all possible speed, you present yourself at our court, resembling that of Khusrau Cyrus, with a suitably-equipped force.

"This matter admits of no delay, for in this extremity, there is neither plan of attack nor way of escape.

"In such strains, therefore, it behoves you, as you desire the increase of our power and our welfare, to obey this summons without delay.²⁹

The Raja, instead of replying to the letter or acting as directed therein, passed on the letter to the British.

This attitude towards the Mutiny, went for all the erstwhile Princely States in India

27. *The Punjab, Past and Present*, April 1974.

28. *Aligarh's First Generation*, David Lelyveld, p. 9.

29. *The Punjab, Past and Present*, April 1974, pp. 158-159.

Sindia, Holkar, Nizam, Gaikwad, Jammu and Kashmir, all helped the British, in subduing the revolt.³⁰ Dost Muhammad of Kabul, with his Pathans, known for their verility and independence, did not oppose the British. "While", writes General Innes, "leaders and chiefs of the Muhammadan Multan and Frontier tribes under the influence of Edwards and the frontier officers raised regiment after regiment of their Multani, Pathan, and other followers (not Sikhs at all), who marched down to the seat of war, and aided the British in the conflict at Delhi."³¹

Raja Ranbir Singh of Jammu and Kashmir, whose father had betrayed the Sikhs and for which he had received the State of Jammu and Kashmir as a reward, supported the British in crushing the Mutiny; he lent 3,000 state troops to the British.³²

10,000 Nepalese Gorkhas under Jang

Bahadur also came to the assistance of the British³³ and, in the words of Lord Canning, acted as "breakwater of the storm which would otherwise have swept over us in one great wave."

Undeserving Acclaim

Let us now take a few cases of those who are lauded for their so-called services to the Mutiny. First of all take the case of the Rani of Jhansi. She had not initially joined the Mutiny, but did so later, and only when her own personal interests suffered at the hands of the British. Rani Lakshmi Bai was married to one Gangadhar Rao of Jhansi; the latter, who died childless within a few years of his marriage, had adopted a child, Damodar before his death. The British, however, refused to recognise the adopted son, and in 1854, Lord Dalhousie annexed Jhansi against the pleadings of the Rani. She was even driven out of her husband's fort and made to live on the pittance of a pension (£ 6,000 per year)

30. "But so exemplary was their loyalty to the British Government in the days of its extremity, that the advocates of native dynasties have adduced it as one of the strongest arguments for maintaining them." (*The History of India*, J. C. Marshman, Vol. iii, p. 451.)

31. *Henry Lawrence*, Lt-Gen. J. J. Mcleod Innes, p. 119.

32. *The First War of Independence, 1857-58*, Marx and Engels, p. 100; According to F.M. Roberts, the Kashmir Contingent of 2200 men and four guns reached Delhi on 6th September 1857. *Forty-one Years in India*, p. 116.)

33. *Marx and Engels*, p. 124; Thorburn, p. 198.

from the British after deducting her husband's debt. Again, when she asked for a lakh of rupees (out of the six lakhs deposited with them) for her adopted son's thread ceremony, the British refused to oblige her.³⁴ Seeing the Rani thus disappointed, a few sepoys went to her place with loaded rifles and tried to prevail upon her to give them supplies and also to join their ranks. *The Rani refused to join them and even asked for British help.* Finding no helpful response from the British, the charming, graceful, "ardent, daring," Rani joined the Mutiny. Under such circumstances to speak of her as the "Indian Joan of Arc" is to belittle that great French woman!³⁵

Another such person was Nana Dhondu Pant (Commonly known as Nana Sahib), one of the three adopted sons of Baji Rao, the Peshwa. After his defeat, Baji Rao was sent to Bithor (near Kanpur) on a pension of eight lakhs of rupees. On Baji Rao's death, the British discontinued the pension. Nana Sahib took his case to London where it was rejected. He was also not allowed the use of his father's seal. So, this "great

dispossessed", when all his efforts to get it restored to him proved of no avail, and "because a salute of guns (such as it is the custom to give to native princes on entering British Territory) had not been accorded to him", he became "thoroughly disgusted and disappointed".³⁶ And thus, like the Rani of Jhansi, for personal reasons and not for any nationalist cause, he joined the Mutiny. Nehru is also of the same opinion; he writes that "those who had joined the Revolt were, as a rule, the disinherited and those deprived of their power and privileges by the British authority, or those who feared that some such fate was in store for them."³⁷

Sikh Support to the Mutiny

To say that no Sikh fought the British during the Mutiny is also not correct. After the Sikh wars, the Bengal Army regiments were "leavened" with a considerable number of Sikhs. And "when the trouble came," writes Macmunn, "the Sikhs in the Bengal regiments, either infected with sympathy for the men of their corps or too isolated and distributed throughout the companies to dare assert their own feelings, joined the Mutiny

34 "Three years afterwards, on the outbreak of the mutiny and the extinction of British authority in the north-west, the Rānee took a fearful revenge for her disappointment, and put to death every European man, woman and child she could seize." (*The History of India*, J. C. Marshman, Vol. iii, p. 397; also see pages 395-396.)

35. For details, the reader may refer to *Rebels of Destiny*, by Homi Mistri.

36. *Forty-one Years in India*, F. M. Roberts, pp. 240, and 238.

37. *The Discovery of India*, Nehru, p. 282.

in the first instance, while their compatriots flocked to the British standards."³⁸ According to Salah-ud-din, the first man to be hanged in the Punjab for sedition was a Sikh civilian of Ropar.³⁹ Cave-Brown gives this man's name as Mohar Singh.⁴⁰ Maharani Jindan, a widow of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, fermented strife "among the Panjabi troops quartered in Oudh and the Sikhs in the Punjab itself."⁴¹

Masson writing about the Sikhs in the Company's service before the Mutiny says that "though most of them had proved reliable, in was not true of all. But he believed that hostility to the Poorbias and the chance of loot would be strong attraction and that some Sikhs would see that their hope of a big part in a new India would lie in a military alliance with the British. He took this calculated risk and was proved right."⁴² I do not think this could be the reason. The Sikhs obeyed their masters and took toll of the hated Poorbias. "The socalled peace in the Punjab during 1857-58, writes Ahluwalia, "was secured by ruthless suppression rather than by any sense of deep seated love and loyalty in the minds of the Panjabis for the British. It is a recorded fact that during the dangerous phase of the

rebellion, Indian civilians, in high positions suspected of even minor misdeamnoun, were hanged by the dozens. Scores of Punjabi deserters from the various regiments were chased and shot dead, and hundreds placed behind the prison bars. *Bairagis*, *Sādhūs* followers of the *derāhs* of Bhais Bir Singh and Maharaj Singh were made a special target of this policy. The latter's name was of such a great dread to the British, that his susccessor, Maharaj Singh, the Junior was arrested while giving religious sermons to his disciples in a village 16 miles from Amritsar. Bedi Bikram Singh who was allowed to live peacefully at Amritsar after his surrender to the British in 1849 was prohibited to go out for the next six months for his daily horse ride. The British nicknamed him as 'the sacerdotal high priest of infanticide notoriety.'⁴³ So complete was the state of confinement and surveillance considered necessary for the safety of this 'wily fanatic', that during these troublous times even the privilege, hitherto enjoyed, of riding a little pony, was withdrawn. He was daily required to pay a visit of courtesy —i. e. personally to report himself to the Chief civilian of the station, F. Cooper, Esq ; and on the occasion of one of these visits the author was presented to him."⁴⁴

38. *The Armies in India*, Macmunn, p. 85.

39. *The Punjab, Past and Present*, April 1974, p. 179.

40. *The Punjab and Delhi in 1857*, Cave Brown, Vol. i, p. 225

41. *Memoirs of the Mutiny*, Col. Francis Cornwallis Maude, Vol. i, p. 31.

42. *Bhai Maharaj Singh*, M. L. Ahluwalia, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1972, pp. 94-95.

43. *A Matter of Honour*, Masson, p. 291.

44. Cave Brown, op. cit. pp. 233-234, fn.

The battle of Delhi was to be decisive. As long as Delhi had not been reduced, "among all classes and races in the Punjab, a spirit of restlessness was on the increase; even the most loyally disposed were speculating on the chances of our being able to hold our own, and doubting the advisability of adhering to our cause. On the part of the Sikhs of Majha, there was an unwillingness to enlist, and no good recruits of their class could be obtained untill after Delhi had fallen."⁴⁵ General Innes also held the same view. He writes: "After the capture of Delhi, when the storm had been weathered and the tide had turned—but not till then—the trans-Sutlej Sikhs came forward and enlisted in thousands, raising the strength of the Punjab troops, it is said, up to some 70,000 men."⁴⁶

Now about the troops employed for the suppression of the Mutiny. Take the case of the Punjab Irregular Force, "which not only stood firm, but proved itself of the utmost value in the suppression of the Mutiny". Practically, all the units of the Punjab Irregular Force at one time or

another had taken part in the siege of Delhi, the relief of Lucknow, and various other engagements in Hindustan and in the Punjab "increasing their reputation as first-class fighting troops."⁴⁷ *The units comprising this Force were not entirely composed of Sikhs, they had Hindus and Muslims also.*

"For example, the 1st Regiment of Sikh Infantry,⁴⁸ and 4th Regiment of Sikh Infantry⁴⁹ each had only 50% of Sikhs, and the balance was made up of Hindus and Muslims. The 2nd Regiment of Sikhs Infantry *had no Sikhs at all*; it was composed of Dogras and Gorkhas only. The Sikhs were taken in this Regiment to replace the Gorkhas during the latter part of 1858.⁵⁰

Surprisingly enough, the multitudes of Hindus and Muslims and the Indian Christians who lacked in patriotic zeal are ignored, while the Sikhs, who formed only about two per cent of the total population are today singled out and blamed for the failure of the Mutiny.⁵¹

Post Mutiny Period

After the Mutiny, the British adopted

45. *Forty-one Years in India*, Roberts, pp. 117-118,

46. *Sir Henry Lawrence*, Lt-Gen. J. J. Mcleod Innes, 1898, p. 119.

47. *History of the Indian Mountain Artillery*, Brig-Gen. C. B. L. Graham, 1957, p. 19.

48. *History of the 1st Sikh Infantry*, 1846, 1886, Reprint 1929, Vol. I.

49. *History of the 54th Sikhs Frontier Force 1846-1914*, Capt. S. R. Shirley, 1915

50. *History of the 2nd Sikhs 12th Frontier Force Regiment, 1846-1933*, Capt. C.W. May, 1933.

51. "—the thirty millions of Bengalees never dreamt of rebellion." (*The History of India*, J. C. Marshman, Vol. iii, p. 453.)

the natural course of rewarding the loyal and punishing those who had opposed them. Thus they relegated Muslims and bestowed favours on the Hindus. Dodwell writes that "in the period immediately following the Mutiny, the British rule offered fewer compensation to the Muslim than to his Hindu fellow countryman. A large proportion of the Muslim, than of the Hindu Government servants, had elected to join the cause of mutineers."⁵² The large percentage of the beurocrats, landlords, factory owners, bankers, capitalists, who had been the pillars of the British Raj in India, was made up of Hindus, followed distantly by the Muslims. This all speaks for itself. Writing in the *Freedom Struggle*, a National Book Trust Publication (1972), Bipan Chandra says that "immediately after the Revolt of 1857 they (British) had repressed the Muslim upper-classes and favoured the Hindu middle and upper classes,..."⁵³ Expressing similar views, Amales Tripathi writes :

"After the revolt had been put down, the British were particularly hard on the Muslims because they had come to the conclusion that the revolt was led by the

Muslims and that they were primarily responsible for it. It is estimated that in Delhi alone, 27,000 Muslims were sentenced to death during the revolt and the short period immediately following. For years the Muslims were viewed with suspicion by the British."⁵⁴

Hindu Thinking

It would be worth examining the general trend in Hindu thinking during the early 19th century, i. e. just before the 1857 revolt broke out. We will take Bengal, the area that first came under the British domination, as an example. The contemporary meetings, journals and periodicals clearly bring out the "pro-British sentiments" of the Bengali Hindus, and "their hatred for the Muhammadan misrule in India prior to the advent of the British."⁵⁵ An article published in *Sambad Kaumudi* on 11th December 1831, reads :

"From such intolerable hardship and oppression, we have by the mercy and the blessing of Almighty God, been relieved by being placed under the mild and

52. *A Sketch of the History of India, 1838-1918*, H. Dodwel, p. 251.

53. P. 74.

54. *Freedom Struggle*, p. 101.

55. *The Bengali Intelligentsia's Attitude to the Revolt of Titu Meer*, by Abhijit Dutta, in the *Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, Vol. xxii, (1981-83), No. 1.

equitable sway of the rule of England, since the establishment of which Government in this country, we have been enjoying every happiness without the least obstruction, having the protection of our persons and property perfectly secured to us."

Raja Rammohan Roy "extolled the merits of the British Government in India" and suggested that "India required many more years of English rule..." Raja Rammohan Roy and his compatriots hated the Muslim rule so much that they considered the British as "deliverers". Their hatred towards the Muslims was so intense that the Bengali Hindus refused to support the revolt that took place in Nadia and Barasat, a few kilometres from Calcutta in 1831, under the inspiration of a Muslim called Titu-Meer. The Hindus feared that the revolt, if successful, would bring back the Mughal rule. Charles H. Heimsath analyses this as under :-

"Nineteenth century leaders (comprising

obviously the Bengali middle class intelligentsia) were proper Victorians, and their political and social advocacies better suited to English than to Indian audiences."⁵⁶

The revolt of Titu Meer was caused by the "deindustrialized cotton-weavers" millions of whom were thrown out of jobs, because of the industrial policies adopted by the British. The Bengal Hindu intelligentsia, writes Abhijit Dutta, "failed to appreciate the socio-economic distress of the *moulyees* and show sympathy for them."⁵⁷

"It is well-known that the Bengalee intelligentsia hailed the suppression of the Revolt of 1857," writes Dr. Tarasankar Bannerjee ; but to justify it, he argues that it was "not so much because they did not have any patriotic feeling, but due to their conviction of the British rule in India was not inconsistent with the interests of Indians in general and Bengalees in particular."⁵⁸

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56. *The Political Framework*, by S. B. Chaudhuri, (Chapter X, *Renascent Bengal*), Calcutta 1272, quoted in *ibid*.
 57. *The Bengali Intelligentsia's Attitude to the Revolt of Titu Meer*, by Abhijit Dutta, based on the book *Indian Speeches and Documents on British Rule*, ed : J. K. Majumbar, Calcutta 1937.
 58. *Early Nationalism in Bengal : Its Concept and Content*, by Dr. Tarasankar Bannerjee (The Quarterly Review of Historical Studis, Vol. xxi, 1981-83, No. 4.)

As for Bihar, Marshman writes : "In two of the most flourishing districts of Behar, containing 10,000 square miles, and filled with landlords whose fathers had felt the heavy hand of resumption, not a finger was raised against our Government, though there was not so much as a corporal's guard left to maintain our power."⁵⁹

Sikh Role

As for the Sikhs and their patriotism, they, ever since the loss of their independence and kingdom, have always been in the forefront in the fight for the country's liberation. Bhai Maharaja Singh was the first to raise the standard of rebellion against the British. He was arrested and banished to Singapore where he died in jail on 5th July 1856. Then came the Kuka Movement, commencing a few months before the outbreak of the Mutiny. "The movement," writes Warburton, who had been in close contact with Movement since 1872, "from the beginning was manifestly directed against the existing government and in the recorded opinions of the most competent authorities of that time, involved a serious menace to the peace of the individual districts."⁶⁰ A large number of the Kukas were arrested, their properties confiscated and many were blown off by guns. Their leader, Baba Ram

Singh, was exiled to Burma where he also like Bhai Maharaj Singh, died in jail.

The Ghadar Movement, the Akali Lehr and the Babbar Akalis are proof of the Sikh patriotism and their fight against British Imperialism. During these movements, numerous Sikhs courted arrest, their properties were confiscated, many were hanged and many more sentenced to other punishments. The Sikh sacrifices for the liberation of the motherland have proportionately been much more than those of the two major communities combined. The figures are as under :-

	Sikhs	Others	Total
Hung by the neck on gallows	93	28	121
Life sentence to Andamans	2147	499	2646
Killed at Jallianwala Bagh	799	501	1300
Killed at Budge Budge Ghat (Calcutta)	67	45	113
Killed in Kuka Movement	91	—	91

Acknowledging the fact, Mian Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, in a paper on Punjab politics, composed in February 1936, wrote : "In nationalist anti-British activities, the contribution of Sikhs has been very great."⁶¹

59. *The History of India*, J. C. Marshman, iii, 452.

60. *Bhai Maharaj Singh*, M. L. Ahluwalia,

61. *The Punjab, Past and Present*, April 1971,

62. *Eighteen Fiftyseven*, S. N. Sen P. 406

The Indian Army was the main prop of the British Empire, and when this prop remained no more (as was proved by the formation of the Indian National Army) the British wisely decided to quit India. In the I.N.A., the Sikhs were represented proportionately in far greater numbers as compared to the other communities who really benefitted when the country became independent.

It is strange that all the Sikh patriotic activities, their sacrifices in life and property in the cause of India's independence are conveniently ignored, and on the other hand, they are blamed for not joining the 1857 Mutiny, handiwork of a portion of one of the three Presidency Armies.

**"The Sepoy Mutiny was not a fight for freedom ;
it was, in fact, King Cobra Superstition's last bite
before his head was smashed"**

— Sir Jadunath Sarkar

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